

Building Bridges through Cultural Connections

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

A culture is something that everyone has, but it also makes everyone different. It is important for people to be culturally competent because the world is a diverse place where everyone has a different background. Learning about other cultures can be educational and fun at the same time. In my personal experiences, I have enjoyed learning about other people through organizations, entertainment, classes, and studying abroad. I have compiled images of my experiences to share with anyone who would like to know more about becoming more culturally competent.

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Process Analysis Statement

Education is an essential part of everyone's life. There are so many topics to learn about, but so little time to learn them in a classroom setting. Special interest topics are often hard to access because of certain major or opportunity restrictions. A topic that everyone can benefit from learning about is cultural competence, which is often not the subject of most majors' classes. Most people do not take the time to learn about other cultures because it does not directly affect their lives. By taking the time to learn, we are less likely to become complacent in our lives, only thinking about ourselves.

In our world, becoming culturally competent should be considered a necessity. The world is becoming more of a connected environment, with a highly increased chance of encountering people of diverse backgrounds in the workplace and in everyday life. Learning about other cultures helps us grow as a people because it creates a more educated, diverse, compassionate, open-minded, and more connected individual. We become aware of the struggles of other communities and learn why other people think and act the way they do. This knowledge can help a person become experienced in interacting with people who are not like them. They will understand how to approach people without sounding offensive or appearing threatening. This is key to creating connections with people.

Once upon a time, America was considered a melting pot where people came to seek their dreams and new opportunities. The metaphor has changed over the last few decades. The melting pot metaphor suggests that once in the same "pot," all of the ingredients cook down into one undifferentiated stew. Now, we are considered a salad bowl; there are many different ingredients, but we all still retain our distinct cultures and flavors in the whole.

I love to learn about other cultures because I find everyone, every ingredient, to be interesting. I love to learn about different customs and traditions. Culture is a part of everyone's backgrounds; it's what makes us who we are. In almost everything I encounter, I find something cultural I want to know more about, whether it is from television, music, books, or games.

My interest in other cultures stems from my childhood watching anime, Japanese cartoons. I saw places in the shows that I wanted to visit or characters would talk about folklore that I then wanted to learn about. Some shows had priestesses and shrines, so I would research the Japanese religion of Shintoism. One of the shows I watched in middle school was about the Norse god Loki. The show also had many other Norse deities that interested me, so my initial searches would lead me down the rabbit hole. If I started with Loki, I learn about his son, Jörmungandr, the giant serpent that encircles the earth, and finally end learning about the Norns, female beings who rule over the destiny of gods and humans.

I also like to connect with people through music. In my phone storage, there are at least 12 languages of music. Of these languages, I listen to English and Korean the most. Through the genre known as K-pop, I have branched into the television side called K-dramas. The wide range of stories interest me, and I love seeing the difference in acting styles. Through the music and television programs I have picked up on certain words and phrases. In Korean, I can say "I love you" in various formalities, "hello," "I'm sorry," and "thank you."

I am the type of person who likes to know the backstories and inspirations of stories and characters before I even finish the story itself. When I start a new show or book, I will look up everything about the mythology tied to it. In high school, I read the "Daughters of the Moon" and "House of Night" series, which both included Greek goddesses. "Daughters of the Moon" uses Selene, the goddess of the moon, while "House of Night" uses Nyx, the goddess of night,

and some adaptations of Cherokee legends. When I searched for info on these goddesses, I learned the difference between primordial deities, titans, and Olympian deities.

Last year an organization called Dear World came to campus with the purpose of having us share our stories with the world. The process was to look deep within ourselves for the memories and events that have had a lasting effect on us and then to tell the world. Students wrote a phrase about their story on their body, and Dear World took a picture to share with the world. I chose the phrase “go outside yourself” because going outside of my personal world is important to me. Trying new things is a part of what helps me to discover myself and everything else.

I take any opportunity I can to become more culturally competent. I am an active member of Ball State’s Asian American Student Association (AASA), Latinx Student Union (LSU), Spectrum, and Black Student Association (BSA). I also try my best to go to other multicultural organizations on campus like the Chinese Club and International Conversation Hour. I have learned so much from these organizations that I probably would have never learned had I not joined them. These organizations host various meetings and events that promote education about their cultures’ religions, traditions, histories, and other aspects of the lives of the people.

I first started as a member of the Asian American Student Association. I learned so much from this organization that I decided to run for the vice president position, and I got it. Through AASA, I have helped facilitate events that make students want to come to our meetings and learn more about us and the various cultures we represent. For our month of events last November, we decided it would be a good idea to have a meeting over something many people outside of the Asian-American community don’t think about: what it’s like to have two identities, one that’s American and one that’s Asian. Our panel consisted of students who are biracial and students

who were adopted from their native country by American parents when they were babies. One panelist wished she knew her mother's native language so she could communicate better with her grandmother. Another panelist, who was adopted, grew up in a White family, but wanted to know about her heritage, so she majored in Chinese and is now the president of the Chinese Club.

Each year AASA goes to the Midwest Asian American Student Union (MAASU) leadership conference. At this conference, we meet new people and attend workshops that help us learn how to understand ourselves and be effective leaders for change. At each conference, we are reminded of the murder of Vincent Chin and what could happen if we do not stand up for ourselves and be voices for change. The great thing about this conference is that more than just Asian-American students attend. I am one of many non-Asian students who are welcomed with open arms. The variety of workshops creates an environment of inclusivity that allows anyone to find something they can relate to or take out of interest. MAASU encourages intersectionality and working with our surrounding communities for the betterment of everyone.

A sure-fire way to get students to attend organizations they would never otherwise think of going to is with free food. Although these events are not necessarily educational, they do encourage the greatest amount of people to come. Every year AASA and LSU make sure to have food events where it is either a potluck or we learn how to make some culturally specific food. We try to partner with the other multicultural organizations to get variety and authenticity. Food is something that everyone can enjoy, regardless of a language barrier.

Another event we have that brings the most people not involved in our organization is our annual fashion show. We also try to collaborate with this event as well because we want to make sure we showcase a variety of authentic pieces and understand their meaning to their respective cultures. Fashion is a great way to share cultures because it inspires people. It is also a great way

to talk about ways to share culture because with people who want to wear clothing from other cultures comes discussions about whether or not a culture is being appropriated. Cultural appropriation is when one culture takes elements of another culture and claims them as their own. This is often seen in the fashion world, like when Marc Jacobs started the new “trend” mini buns, but Black women had been wearing Bantu knots long before Jacobs “thought” of it. This is a very important topic in today’s society because it deals with the issues of respecting someone else’s culture, claiming it as one’s own, or wearing it as a costume.

Each semester, Spectrum hosts drag shows featuring student and local performers to raise money for non-profit organizations that support LGBT+ people. Spectrum is Ball State’s LGBT+ and allies organization that provides social support to create a comfortable, confidential, and accepting atmosphere for its members. The LGBT+ community has a culture all its own. I love volunteering for the drag shows because they are a safe space for people to express themselves and showcase their art. I go to Spectrum’s meetings and events because I learn about different parts of the community from personal experiences. I have learned about polyamorous relationships, being LGBT+ in the military, and more interesting topics I never would have thought about.

This past summer I studied abroad in Spain. I had never been out of the country before, but I was excited to start this new adventure. I took classes to improve my language skills and learn about the Spanish culture. I chose to stay with a host family because I wanted to fully immerse myself in the country and experience the home life personally. I learned so much from my host parents and their family that I will always cherish. My program and classes were wonderful, and we often took trips to different locations to see historical sites or experience other parts of the culture. Our program took trips to Al Alhambra, the last Muslim palace, the Alcázar,

the royal palace in Sevilla, and the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba. The best part about studying abroad was that I was able to make new friends from around the world. If I ever go back, I will already have connections and a place to stay.

Learning about other cultures is important because it can help people understand each other. We each have different values and perspectives. As the world grows, so will our chances of meeting people who are different from us. Being able to understand each other's differences means being able to better communicate with each other. There are always areas for improvement, and I am more than willing to do my part to help people better understand each other.

For the creative portion of this project, I put together a collage of images showing that it is possible to also enjoy learning about other cultures. With each image, I provide an explanation of the event and why I found it interesting. I also created a video of the images to go along with the project. For the audio track, I initially didn't know what song I wanted to play at the end. While keeping up to date on one of my favorite Korean music groups, BTS, I remembered that they would be performing at the American Music Awards. BTS performed their song "DNA," and now they have a lot of new American fans. This event brought a South Korean group into the American spotlight and caused more people to want to know about them and possibly other artists. I wanted to use this song because it is a great example of how sharing something from a different culture can make an impact.